

# Invest in event planning not just event marketing

Many organizations, especially nonprofits and associations, focus on having one annual event that is meant to be a fundraiser or a idea-raiser. Events are a great way to publicize an organization, get people together, and provide value to attendees. Except when the events don't go well. And that is a big exception.

Unfortunately, many events have better publicity than planning, and that is guaranteed to backfire. What I mean is that event organizers spend inordinate amounts of time and money to make sure that people know and attend a conference, and spend much less time and money on the logistics of the event.

This past Saturday, I attended a "women's conference." It had a very nice website, and was going to deal with some intriguing subject matter (women and politics, women in developing countries, etc.) I believed the hype and bought my ticket (also, I had a very nice discount from a friend involved with the group).

First indication of a problem was the disparity of information between the ticket and the website. One said the program started at 8:30, the other that registration started then, and the program at 9:45. Neither was right.

**Lesson: Make sure the details are correct, and that everyone has the same information.**

The people who were involved with greeting and registering were doing neither when I arrived at 8:50. Badges were still being put out. No one handed me a program. It was disorganized.

The program did not start until 10:15. From there, everything ran late. No one thought to tell people where the breakout sessions would be, and one was on a different floor (the session I was signed up for).

**Lesson: Timing matters.**

The “panelists” for the session I attended were sitting and chatting amongst themselves for 25 minutes, ignoring the fact that 40 people were sitting and waiting for them to start.

**Lesson: Explain expectations to presenters.**

And then there was the issue of lunch. It was supposed to be “grab and go.” I am vegetarian and guess what, there was not a single vegetarian option to be found.

**Lesson: If you are going to offer food (and there is no other food available on site) then you have to consider dietary restrictions.**

The bottom line is that the event organizers did not pay attention to the organization aspect of running an event. While I am sure that some people got some value from this particular event, these lapses in logistics wasted my time (and my money).

Event planners pay attention to every last detail from food choice and availability to coat checks to bathroom locations. Event marketers, on the other hand, are focused on getting registrations. Both are EQUALLY important. **If you sacrifice planning for publicity, you will have a disorganized event. If you sacrifice publicity for planning, you will have a poorly attended event.** Either scenario will create PR headaches for you later on.

In my case, I will probably never attend this particular women’s conference again. My perception of the event and its organizers is that they were more focused on the bottom line

than on making sure everything went smoothly for the attendees.

**If you are organizing an event, be sure you spend as much time planning it as you do publicizing it.** And PS, event planning is a skill. Get qualified/experienced people to help plan your event. It does pay off.

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## Who is your audience?

Perhaps the most basic question you have to ask yourself before creating any marketing/communications materials is:

### **Who is my target audience?**

The more you know who they are, where they are and what they need, the better your materials will be.

And yet. A couple of days ago, I was driving down Massachusetts Avenue in Northwest D.C. and saw a sign outside of a church that made me wonder.

The sign said:

*English Classes Available. Please Call [telephone number] to Enroll.*

Now, if you need to learn English, can you read English? Nope. Is the audience for this sign people who know people who need to learn English? Perhaps. I would think this sign would be more effective if it were written in the language of the people you are trying to target, don't you think?

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# Me! Me! It's all about ME!!!!

Two-year-olds LOVE the word me. They are just learning that they are individuals and that they want whatever their siblings or friends have. "Me too," they shout. "Daddy, Mommy, look at me!!!"

You would think Twitter has been overrun by a nursery school. In endless posts, self-promoters don't use the word me as such, instead, they go on about their blog, their client, their big idea. Post after post after post. Never "engaging" with others, never re-tweeting others, and certainly never sharing anything useful.

Take for example the life coach who just came up with a brilliant idea. She is going to make sure you hear about it—she even created her own hashtag. And she wants you to join in. Or the business development "expert" who wants you to like her Facebook page, and asks you every SINGLE day, several times a day. Or the PR guy who constantly tells you how great he is because his VIP clients have been featured in the media.

Sure, you should use Twitter and social media outlets to promote your business (and yourself if you are your business). HOWEVER, if all you do is self-promote, then you are mired in ME-ONLY thinking. In other words, you are being egotistical and/or narcissistic in your use of Twitter. Twitter is a SOCIAL media platform. Social means that there is more than one person out there, right? You want to INTERACT with other people, not just have people look at you.

Think about the Twitter users you enjoy following. What makes

them stand out? I bet they:

- Share interesting articles and insights
- Interact with you (answer your questions, comment on your tweets)
- Re-tweet what you share

In other words, they don't only talk about themselves. They have grown out of the "terrible twos" and have learned that there is an US or a WE out there, not just a ME.

How should you deal with the "me-all-the-time" tweeps? Easy. Unfollow. You won't miss their egos clogging up your stream.

What do you think about my post? Ha ha! Just kidding.

Seriously, though, how far should self-promotion go on Twitter?

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## **To curse or not to curse, that is the question**

A couple of days ago I was reading my book while aboard Metro. A couple of stops into the ride, a group of three guys got on and sat right next to me. For the next 30 minutes I was "treated" to a non-stop, curse-filled treatise on everything from how women dress to jobs to how living in the suburbs is for the birds (although that was not the way it was actually said). These guys were not speaking amongst themselves. They

were loud and obnoxious and did not care who heard them.

I felt uncomfortable, and I wondered, had I had a child with me, whether they would have moderated their behavior or whether they would have responded if I had asked them to watch their language.

I know, it seems old-fashioned to “watch your language.” But there is a public space and a private space, and when you are in public, you are sharing the air and space with other people. You should try to be considerate.

Instead, we see cursing all the time on Twitter, Facebook and every which way we turn. Some people are bring cursing to advertising, in order “to break through the clutter.” I just read this article on Talent Zoo about cursing in the ad industry, where the author feels the need to be graphic in demonstrating what he is referring to.

There is no need to curse in public. You can do whatever you want in private. You can smoke and drink and overindulge in ice cream. In the public space—in communications—you should put a lid on it.

What do you think? Do you curse or not in public? Do you care?

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## **Special is special unless it isn't**

I recently flew to Fort Lauderdale and back on US Airways. On both flights, the flight attendants had a “special” offer for us, a “specially selected flight.” The offer— only available

until April 30 (or the whole month of April, whichever way you look at it) was to sign up for a credit card, and get bonus miles. The rest was so complicated that the flight attendant was struggling to explain what it was and how it worked (something to the effect that if you spent x dollars then you could buy a free companion ticket to anywhere except where it is not available).



Photo by Dr. Keats from Flickr

**This was not a special offer.** It was a run of the mill sign up today for our credit card so that we credit you 5000 miles for the trip. This is not different from any of the airline credit cards or even the points credit cards out there.

**This was not unique to our flight.** The flight attendants made the same pitch twice. And the guy next to me had heard it on another flight.

**Moral of the story:** Don't say something is special if it is not. Most people are savvy enough to know when something is really special and when it is not. Also, don't repeat your special offer by saying it is only available to a select few

when you've already offered it to many many others.

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# The single worst communications mistake

The single worst mistake you can make in communications is not living up to your promise (s). Why? It breaks trust.

Sadly, we see it all the time from big companies and small. Like when a wireless carrier tells you that you will have unlimited data, only to cap you after a certain amount. Or when an airline advertises a low price on a fare only to reference some small print saying it is available only at midnight of the day that Jupiter lines up with Mars.

When you continually break promises you create a cynical customer. He or she no longer trusts what you say, and takes what you say with a grain of salt. Cynical customers are not loyal customers.

It goes beyond false advertising though. In business and personal communication, you also can run the risk of losing trust. If you tell your friend you will be at her birthday party and then don't show up. If you promise your client that you will send a document and then you don't.

We've all heard that the most common lie is "the check's in the mail." How many times can you tell someone payment is forthcoming and the check is not there?

When you as a business or you as an individual fail to live up to your promises, you are helping create a culture of

mistrust, cynicism and disappointment.

Do you agree? Is there something worse than making your customers/friends distrust/mistrust you or your business?

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## **Are you beating your customers over the head?**

Have you ever gone to a new (to you) website or blog and before you can read anything you get a pop up ad or form DEMANDING that you fill it out? It happened to me today as I was following a link from someone on Twitter. And what was worse, there was no opting out, no little “thanks but no thanks” box I could click. It was either sign up for my newsletter or you can’t read my blog.

Can you imagine if a bricks and mortar store did that? You would walk in, ready to browse (and perhaps you were ready to buy something), and there would be someone standing in the doorway, demanding that you fill out a survey or a customer sign up sheet. If you didn’t want to comply, then you would not be allowed to enter the store. You know what would happen to that store? It would lose all sorts of potential customers/business.

I understand that blog and websites want to have something tangible from visitors: a sign up or a purchase. But making it a condition for reading your website/blog’s content, guarantees you will lose some potential readers. Why would I want to sign up for your newsletter if I can’t even read about you?

Don't beat your customers over the head. Ask them to sign up, but don't make it a precondition for a relationship unless you want to destroy relationships before they start.

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## 4 Passover Lessons for Marketing and Communications

Passover is almost over for those of us who celebrate it. The eight-day-long Jewish holiday celebrates liberation from slavery in Egypt. For most people, the main observance of the holiday is abstaining from eating bread and other leavened products (because the Israelites fleeing Egypt did not have enough time to allow their bread to rise), and substituting matza instead.

Can Passover inform any marketing communications decisions? I think it can. Here are four Passover lessons for your marcomm efforts:

### **One: Freedom rules!**

Passover is a festival that celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. In marketing and communications, we also celebrate freedom. We don't want to be tied to one platform, one way of thinking, solutions that no longer work. Celebrate and use your freedom!

### **Two: Change is good**

During passover, we eat matza for eight days, and don't eat

bread, pasta, etc. It is a change for most people, a pause, a reset. It challenges your routine, forces your creativity. When you do things differently for a short time, you may discover what works and what doesn't.

### **Three: Dress it up a bit**

In my opinion, matza is infinitely better when spread with cream cheese or jelly (or both). Plain is just OK. In other words, some bells and whistles help. For example, having a well designed, attractive website can give your business an edge over a dull, plain website.

### **Four: Friends and family are key**

Passover is a holiday that is better when celebrated with friends and family. In marketing and communications, your "friends and family" are your customers and your promoters. In social media they are your followers and "likers." Your friends and family are the cornerstone of your outreach efforts.

Do you see any other lessons in Passover?

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**Is it the story or the**

# storyteller?

Lately, I have been seeing lots of articles being written about how important storytelling is, most recently 3 Reasons to Master the Art of Storytelling on Inc. Magazine's website. This has got me to thinking on whether you can become a better storyteller, or is it something you are born with. Or, does it matter at all if you are good or bad at storytelling if your story is great (or terrible).

**So, is it the story or the storyteller?**

A bit of both in my opinion. A bad storyteller could ruin the best story, but a boring story won't get any more exciting if someone tells it really well.

But, can you make the telling of the story better?

Yes!

These are my tips for improving your storytelling ability, while cautioning you that you have to have a good story to start with.

1) **Have a point, and don't bury it.** Start with the end in mind. Is there anything worse than a pointless story?

2) **Don't get bogged down with all the details.** I had a friend years ago who was the kind of storyteller that would make you look at your watch ten times because she had to relay every single last detail. (Like this: I was walking to the train station in my new blue shoes with tassels, and then I saw the cutest cocker spaniel, and I started talking to the woman who was walking the dog, she was wearing a jumpsuit that I had seen in a store window....).

3) **Realize your audience may not view the story the same way you do.** You have a specific point of view, but if it is very specific to you and your worldview, it may fall flat with your

audience. There are things that are more universal than others, and to resonate, your story has to have some type of “universal truth.”

4) **Adapt to your surroundings.** If you are telling a story to your friends in your living room you may be more informal, whereas if you are telling a story to the board in the corporate headquarters, you may need to be a tad more buttoned up.

5) **Use humor, but only if it is not offensive or obtuse.** Have you ever been told a story, and the teller throws in some weird joke you don't think is funny? Or worse, you think is offensive (these jokes are usually tired canards about women, or racist stereotypes)?

What would add? And do you think the right storyteller can make up for a bad story? Let me know in the comments.

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## **Is your marketing communication better than you?**

Have you ever run into a situation where a company has absolutely gorgeous marketing materials, but its service or product is sub par? That's a situation where the marketing draws people in, but the product or service loses them.

I am looking to do some home improvement and I went to Angie's List. I found several companies in the category and checked out each company website. I was pretty impressed with one company in particular. Their website was not only attractive,

but functional and informative. I called to make an appointment for an estimate. The woman seemed friendly and knowledgeable and set up an appointment that would be confirmed via email. This company seems to be pretty technologically savvy. The appointment was confirmed but a couple of hours later I got an email from a manager saying that he couldn't keep that appointment and could we change it. We went back and forth and settled on Tuesday (yesterday) at 6 p.m.

At 5 p.m. yesterday the estimator called to tell me he can't make it and can he come tomorrow. As it turns out, I don't have time today, and I figured that if a company can't keep an appointment that does not bode well for the process. Further, it is not professional to keep changing appointments and to offer excuses. My time is valuable and if this company wants my business, the estimator would make an effort to show at the appointed time. I told him to forget it. There are other companies that do this work, and so far, two other companies have shown up on time for our estimate appointments. For me, punctuality and reliability are important indicators of how a company performs.

In this case, this company appears to be competent but in practice is not.

When your marketing is bad, you may not get the customers you want. But if your marketing is better than you are, your potential customers will not stick with you. They will be drawn in, but you will lose them.

Your marketing should be attractive, but if you are spending more money and time on marketing and less on your service or product, that marketing dollar is wasted.

Thoughts?